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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000103

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01-20-14

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#) [JA](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Ambassador Lunstead and Japanese Special Envoy Akashi discuss Sri Lankan situation and next steps

Refs: (A) State 11999

- (B) Colombo 88, and previous (All Notal)

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.  
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Lunstead met January 20 with Japanese Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi. The two discussed Sri Lanka's ongoing cohabitation impasse and its impact on the peace process. Both agreed it was important for the U.S. and GoJ to continue to consult in the leadup to the meeting of the Tokyo process co-chairs slated to take place in Washington on February 17. Akashi was basically in a listening mode during the meeting, but was clearly very concerned about the cohabitation deadlock. Per Ambassador's comments to Akashi, the U.S. side plans to underscore the need for the international community to support the underlying peace process during the January 23 Tokyo follow-up meeting in Colombo. END SUMMARY.

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Akashi Reviews Visit  
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2. (C) Ambassador Lunstead met with Japanese Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi on January 20. Akashi was accompanied by Japanese Ambassador Akio Suda and several other GoJ officials. DCM, AID Director, and Polchief also sat in on the meeting. Akashi arrived in Colombo on January 19 to kick off a week-long visit, which will culminate in a meeting of donor and international organization representatives scheduled to be held in Colombo on January 23. Akashi noted that he wanted to use his visit to obtain first-hand impressions of the ongoing political deadlock between Sri Lanka's President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, and its impact on the peace process. To accomplish this, he had a full plate of meetings in Colombo and would travel to the northern town of Kilinochchi on January 22 to get the viewpoint of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the situation.

3. (C) Regarding Japanese government positioning on the Sri Lankan situation, Akashi said the GoJ agreed that there should be a linkage between aid and progress in the peace process, but that it should be a positive, rather than a negative linkage. To this end, assistance should be "used as a stimulant" to encourage further progress in the peace process and to pressure the two sides to return to negotiations. Stressing the need to concentrate on upholding the ceasefire agreement, he said the Tigers could cause an "untoward event," and noted that "no-one should be complacent" regarding the ceasefire. Given the heightened risk of an LTTE-GSL confrontation caused by a misunderstanding, it was vital that the President and the PM find a way to end their cohabitation infighting soon and refocus on ways to re-energize the peace track.

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Analysis of Current Situation  
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4. (C) Akashi then asked Ambassador Lunstead for his assessment of the situation in Colombo, and of the likelihood of a rapprochement between the President and Prime Minister. Ambassador responded by noting that the impasse between the two was very serious. This was ironic in that the President and PM had agreed on roughly 80 percent of the issues necessary for a compromise, but the two were hung up on the last 20 percent. Ambassador Lunstead noted that the question was now one of which Defense Ministry powers would be given back to the PM, and which kept in the President's hands (see Ref B). Ambassador further noted that, in his view, the underlying motive for the President's action was her demand that she not be treated by the PM

for the next two (or three) years of her term in the same way she felt she had been treated in the past two years -- excluded from decision-making. That said, the Ambassador continued, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)/Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) alliance decreased the prospects of the President reaching a compromise with the Prime Minister, and the prospect that the President might call for general elections seemed more likely now. Elections would probably solve little and could well make things worse.

15. (C) Turning to the linkage between politics and assistance, Ambassador made the point that there was a need to distinguish between progress in peace negotiations, which had been stalled since April 2003, and progress in the peace process. Progress in the peace process continued and the international community could use its assistance to reinforce that progress. Akashi agreed with this distinction. At the same time, given the absence of progress in peace negotiations, the full amount of aid pledged at the June 2003 Tokyo donors conference would not be possible to deliver at this point. That said, both the Ambassador and Akashi agreed that the international community could move forward on humanitarian assistance and other short-term forms of relief activities in the north and east, and on some assistance to the south -- all activities in support of the peace process.

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Next Steps  
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16. (C) Turning to next steps, Akashi and the Ambassador discussed the modalities of the Tokyo follow-up meeting of donor and international organization representatives scheduled to take place in Colombo on January 23. Akashi said the meeting would be two-part: the first part would involve only bilateral and multilateral donor representatives; the second part, would include these representatives plus GSL and LTTE representatives if the Tigers decided to accept their invitation and participate. Ambassador Suda noted that the Tigers had not yet stated if they would attend, and he thought there was a less than 50 percent chance that the group would show up. The GoJ side was committed to working on ways to minimize the possibility of interaction between the U.S. and the LTTE sides at the January 23 meeting if the Tigers did attend. Wrapping up, Ambassador Lunstead said he felt the January 23 meeting would be very constructive, and should prove a valuable stepping stone for the February 17 co-chairs meeting in Washington. He urged that the two sides continue to consult in the leadup to the February meeting. Akashi said he welcomed the February co-chair meeting in Washington and agreed that continued consultation was important for the GoJ. Both agreed that it was important for members of the international community to be on the same page regarding Sri Lanka; the February meeting would help ensure that that continued to be the case.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) Akashi was basically in a listening mode throughout the meeting and used the discussion to gain insight into the complicated, shifting situation in Sri Lanka. He was obviously extremely worried about the serious cohabitation impasse which has cropped up in Colombo since his last visit in September 2003 and its negative impact on efforts to bring the GSL and the LTTE back to the negotiating table. At the same time, he was receptive to Ambassador's distinction between the peace process, which continues every day, and the peace negotiations, which are currently stalled, and he agreed that the international community can use its assistance to reinforce the underlying peace process in targeted ways (the U.S. side plans to underline this key point during the January 23 Tokyo follow-up meeting in Colombo). Akashi also agreed that the February 17 meeting in Washington presents a signal opportunity to engage with the other co-chairs and set a common course on Sri Lankan assistance issues in light of the negative developments in Colombo. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD